THE END

MARVEL PG

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JIM STARLIN

AL MILGROM

HGWells

THE END

MARVEL

PREVIOUSLY...

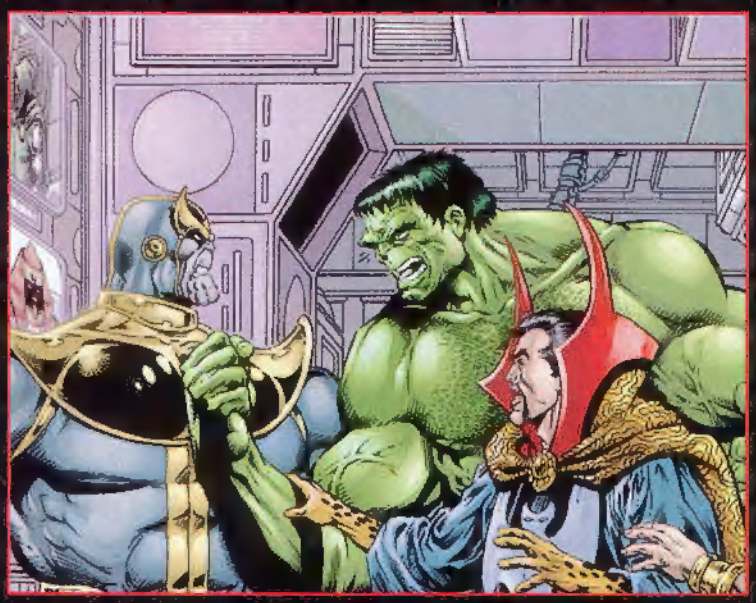
AKHENATEN

THANOS

DR. DOOM

THOR

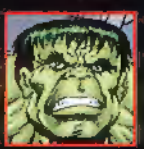
ZEUS

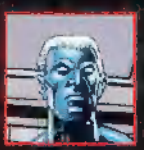


SILVER SURFER

DR. STRANGE

NAMOR


HULK


CAPTAIN MARVEL

Earth has been conquered by the apparently omnipotent Akhenaten without a single shot being fired. But there have been casualties: the Avengers, the Fantastic Four and the X-Men are dead, executed by the returned pharaoh.

Thor and Zeus joined forces with a pantheon of elder gods to confront Akhenaten but also fell victim to the conqueror's might, with only the son of Odin and the ruler of Olympus escaping destruction.

Meanwhile, Doctor Doom's intelligence gathering has netted him what appears to be Akhenaten's one weakness: his past as an ancient Egyptian ruler.

And Thanos of Titan, with Captain Marvel, the Hulk, Dr. Strange, the Silver Surfer and Namor, seeks to locate the source of Akhenaten's seemingly limitless power--the Celestial Order--and cut him off from it.

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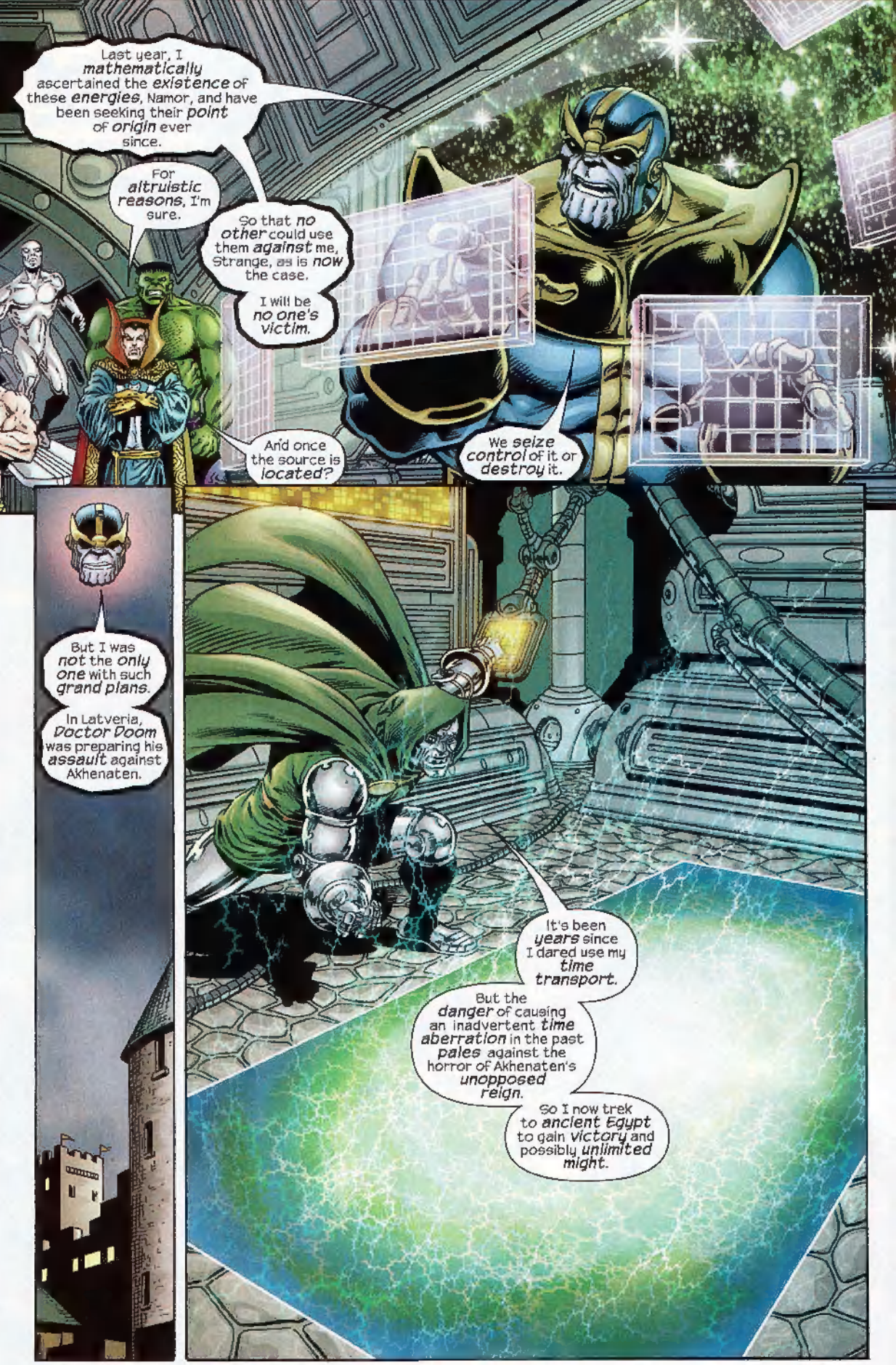
EXTINCTION!

The #1 rule of this merciless universe: If a species develops in any way that is counterproductive to its survival, it does not last long.
Earth's own history has hundreds of examples of this unfortunate occurrence.
Take the Brontotheres, for example: a lumbering herd animal that lived some 55 to 30 million years ago.
Its size alone protected it from most predators of the time.
But nature made an enormous error when designing this brute.

Instead of fabricating its impressive horn of cartilage or hair, like the modern day rhino, nature chose to sculpt it of bone, which would shatter.
Extinction soon followed, relatively speaking.
After the dinosaurs perished, the Gastornis became Earth's most efficient hunter.
But this bird grew too large to nest in trees, and so its vulnerable hatchlings became prey to insects.
Extinction.
Of course, I didn't realize our own reality was headed for this same fate as I led Captain Marvel and the Defenders into the depths of uncharted space.
All goes according to plan.
You're having no difficulty tracking the energy emanations that empower Akhenaten back to their source, Titan?
It is an easy task for this ship's instrumentation, Surfer.
These scanners were designed to detect just such arcane radiations.
You were seeking this power source even before Akhenaten's arrival?


Last year, I mathematically ascertained the existence of these energies, Namor, and have been seeking their point of origin ever since.
For altruistic reasons, I'm sure.
So that no other could use them against me, Strange, as is now the case.
I will be no one's victim.
And once the source is located?
We seize control of it or destroy it.
But I was not the only one with such grand plans.
In Latveria, Doctor Doom was preparing his assault against Akhenaten.
It's been years since I dared use my time transport.
But the danger of causing an inadvertent time aberration in the past pales against the horror of Akhenaten's unopposed reign.
So I now trek to ancient Egypt to gain victory and possibly unlimited might.

And in the capital of Earth's most powerful nation, its leaders were discovering their situation had gone from bad to worse.
It's unbelievable, Mr. President.
NO MORE TULIAS!
TAX THE RICH!
NO WAR FOR OIL!
JAIL CORPORATE CROOKS!
Every military aircraft and ship we possess has just vanished.
Their crews miraculously found themselves back at their home bases.
What about our other weaponry?
Gone.
Everything from our atomic bombs to small arms.
Same story from police forces across the country.
The ultimate in gun control.
Even our guns are gone!
There is no longer any need for weapons.
You are now under the protection of Akhenaten the Infinite!
Somebody tell me that's not who I think it is.
Please.

But how can we maintain order without armed forces?
How can we collect taxes or wage war?
And executions?!
I have created an Imperial Police Force, which is already weeding out your society's more undesirable elements.
Beyond the reach of the Imperial Police, my expedition against Akhenaten was, nonetheless, far from a well-oiled fighting machine.
Dissension within the ranks.

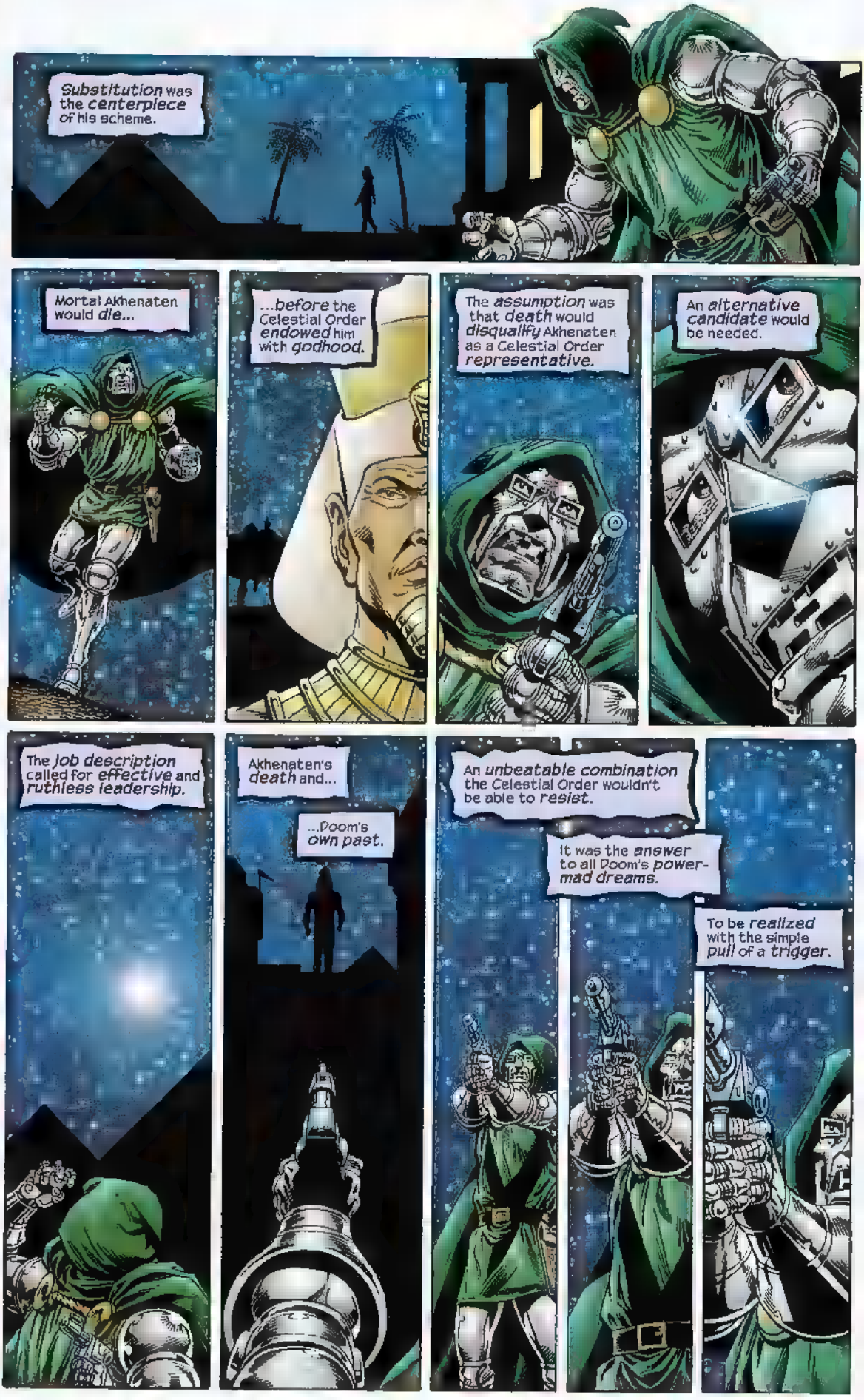
Strange, I *care not* that you and Captain Marvel *successfully* fought at Thanos's side during a recent *cosmic crisis.*
You *cannot trust* the Titan.
I know from *experience* what a *master* of *deceit* he truly is.
Tell you the truth, your two *quarrelsome friends* currently *worry* me *more* than Thanos does.
We'd probably *all* be *dead* by now if he hadn't grabbed us up.
And I don't see *anyone* proposing a *better course* of *action* than his.
True enough.
But eventually *his goals* and *ours* will differ.
What then?
I will probably *betray* you, Surfer.
Or perhaps I *won't.*
I *admit* to being what you call *evil.*
And the *very nature* of evil is to be self-serving.
Akhenaten is as much a *threat* to *me* as he is to *you.*
Until his *defeat* is assured you need not *fear me.*
Nor will I *force* you to work *with* me.
Go your *own way* if you wish.
You've *stopped* your craft.
Why?
I have detected what I suspect are *Celestial Order scannings,* and will need time to *cloak* us from their view.

ENOUGH!
I will tolerate no more of your arrogant insolence!
Incredible!
Even in the midst of such cosmic peril they cannot keep their tempers in check!
See, I told you...
I shall handle this.
These force fields will restrain your comrades until they regain their senses.
Let Hulk out!

Being unencumbered by such troublesome allies, Doctor Doom would launch the first serious strike against Akhenaten.
The exact time and place have been programmed into the time transport.
So with the push of a button I depart the present...
...and return to the land of the pharaohs.
When all-powerful Akhenaten was but a mere mortal.
Before the Celestial Order granted him power beyond belief.
Prior to their selecting him as their appointed representative.
A time when he was vulnerable to a well-aimed ray blast.

As is this unfortunate palace guard.
It's always a wise move to test your weaponry when traveling through time.
All appears to be in order.
Let us then locate and terminate our main prey.
That did not seem to take long.
Quite simple, really.
I suspect few, if any, have been brazen enough to dare trespass on the Order's privacy.
Done.
We are now invisible to the Celestial Order's scanners.
Their security arrangements are rather pathetic.
Such arrogance will prove their downfall.
I'm sensing unbelievable energies in this region.

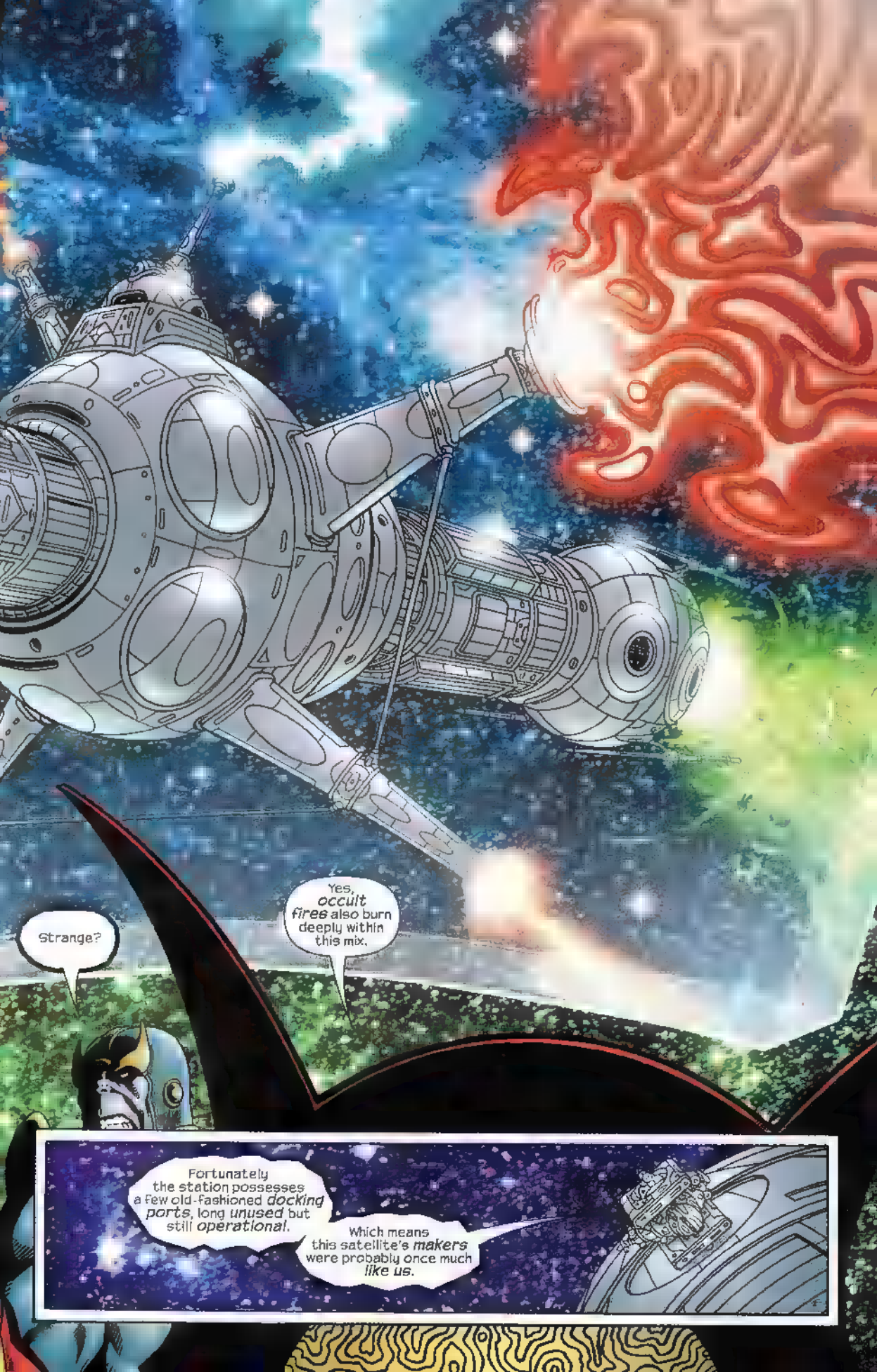
We near the source from which all other power throughout time and space springs.
It is a phenomenon I have dubbed the heart of the universe.
Cute name.
My long search for it nears its end.
How ironic that I have only succeeded in this quest because another has misused this great discovery.
I felt I should wait until Marvel was occupied before telling you that I agree with you, concerning Thanos.
This supposed heart of the universe must not fall into the Titan's grasp.
For the moment, we need to work with this madman.
Too much is at stake not to.
But you must stay close and keep a sharp eye on him.
For you are the only one with the power to do what must be done.
Which is?
The first sign of betrayal on Thanos's part and he must be mercilessly dispatched.
I was never any good at inspiring loyalty.
On the other hand, overconfidence would be Doom's undoing.


Substitution was the centerpiece of his scheme.
Mortal Akhenaten would die...
...before the Celestial Order endowed him with godhood.
The assumption was that death would disqualify Akhenaten as a Celestial Order representative.
An alternative candidate would be needed.
The job description called for effective and ruthless leadership.
Akhenaten's death and...
...Doom's own past.
An unbeatable combination the Celestial Order wouldn't be able to resist.
It was the answer to all Doom's power-mad dreams.
To be realized with the simple pull of a trigger.

NO!
YES!
Doom, did you truly believe me so foolish as to leave my past unguarded?
I only allowed you to get this close so that your capture would be all that much more gratifying.
From the start, I considered you one of my most dangerous adversaries.
And so history continued, unchanged.
Under the watchful eye of its dark guardian.
As the Defenders and I neared the source of Akhenaten's might, the Celestial Order's defenses grew more sophisticated, but nothing I could not outwit.
We are coming into visual range of our destination.

A planet, Titan?
No, it appears to be a satellite.
The energies at work in this sector are playing havoc with my sensors.
You're not blindly leading us into a trap, are you?
Nothing I have seen so far suggests that the Celestial Order places any value on guile.
I begin to suspect them of being a naively altruistic organization.
But Thanos will not bend a knee to even a benign despot.
Still, their technologies are truly quite impressive.
Locking onto a visual.
Putting it up on the big screen.
By Neptune!
Grozit!
What is it?
It's a space station, Hulk...

But unlike any I have ever before encountered.
Odd energies spewing forth like exhaust emissions...
Forces alien to me also, Surfer.
There's a complexity and starkness to these energies I cannot even pretend to comprehend, even with my cosmic awareness.


Strange?
Yes, occult fires also burn deeply within this mix.
Fortunately the station possesses a few old-fashioned docking ports, long unused but still operational.
Which means this satellite's makers were probably once much like us.

Stay near to me.
My armor's cloaking device is only effective for 30 or 40 meters.
You're stepping on my heels, gargoyle.
Purple-puss said close.
Had to be the Defenders and not the Avengers...

Alive?!

Not only alive, young Thor, but in the exact locale mighty Zeus wished to escape to.
Where?
The question is more aptly stated, where and when?

Greetings, great INFINITY and magnificent ETERNITY!
The rulers of Olympus and Asgard come to you for much needed counsel and aid.
Then I must sadly inform you, noble Zeus, that you have journeyed here in vain.
You refuse to help us?!
Why?!
[redacted] cannot aid you, godling.
For Infinity and I are blind.
Where all time and space were once ours to gaze upon, we are presently limited to the here and now.
This occurred shortly after Lord Chaos and Master Order warned us of the threat that you now most likely flee from.

The advent of this Akhenaten has terribly upset the balance of this actuality.
Cosmic focal points have shifted and carefully crafted alignments have gone askew.
This has thrown all there ever was or will be into turbulent flux.
I have always been keenly aware of my entrance and far-distant exit from existence.
But now the former is fogged by unimaginable distance...
...and the latter so close I cannot take it all in.
It doth sound as if you speak of the imminent destruction of the universe!
I do.
This cannot be!
Every turn ■ different design style.
Hulk no like.
Appears the Celestial Order tends to borrow heavily from other cultures.
Perhaps an inability to create anything unique, or...?
You sense something, Marvel?
I think it's one of the Order coming down the hall, behind us.
Perhaps concealment is in order.
Hulk no hide!
Bruce, please!

Plainly the creature had once been corporeal and somewhat humanoid.
But now the members of the Order were beings of contained energy, walking transmitters of infinite power.
Their form now nothing more than a vague racial memory of what they once were.
So much sheer might, but so far from infallibility.
The creature was oblivious to our presence.
While I...
That being is connected directly to that which we seek.
Coordinating the signal...
Near?
Extremely.
Just down this corridor, I do believe.
What?!
Amazing!
Such power...
Beautiful...

Behold, the HEART of the UNIVERSE!
Hulk needs sunglasses.

I knew it existed!
None of the computer analyses would confirm my theories, yet still I believed!
And I was right!
It doesn't seem real.

Surfer, be prepared.
The prize is at hand; if the Titan plots betrayal, he'll soon act.
Do not hesitate!

Then fate chose to painfully illustrate the folly of taking on such a delicate mission in the company of the intellectually deprived.
ROBOT!
A mere systems tech, ignore it.
Hulk...

KRAK
HULK SMASH!

Stupidity strikes again!
The Hulk's or mine, for bringing him along?
We're dead.
Quite likely.
Then let us go down fighting, Defenders!
It was a sentiment I truly embraced at that moment.
But destiny is a mean-spirited jester.
In fact, a much crueler fate awaited me.
TO BE CONTINUED...